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ANTI-SANDINIST AID SPLITS HOUSE PANEL

Decision Is Delayed on Funds'
Cutoff — 5 Congressmen
Plan to Tour the Region

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 22 — The House Intelligence committee was badly split today, mostly along party lines, about whether to recommend cutting off funds for covert support of rebels seeking to overthrow the Sandinist Government of Nicaragua.

Five members of the committee, Democrats and Republicans, accepted the invitation of William J. Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence, to tour the region this weekend.

The committee has delayed a decision until after President Reagan addresses a joint session of Congress on Wednesday on the problems of Central America. "We decided to put things on hold until the President comes before Congress," Representative Robert H. Michel of Illinois, the Republican leader and a committee member, said in a telephone interview from Peoria.

Democrats Ready to Cut Aid

Most committee Democrats favor cutting off the covert aid on the ground that it is now an open secret. They contend that Congress should debate and vote on whether to make the aid overt. Most committee Republicans, on the other hand, favor continuing the aid as an effort to counter Communist influence in the region.

President Reagan, meanwhile, underscored a Government allegation that the Palestine Liberation Organization has provided aid to the Sandinist Government. "I can tell you that the report is true," Mr. Reagan said at a news conference. "They, like the others from the Communist states, have been in there and are in there."

The President also cited Brazil's interception of four Libyan aircraft destined for Nicaragua, with a cargo that the Administration said was headed for the rebels in El Salvador, as further evidence of the international aspect of the conflict. The aircraft, ostensibly carrying medicine, turned out to be laden with military equipment.

'Just Further Evidence'

The President said, "The episode with the Brazilians' holding the planes from Libya the other day, when the aspirins they were supposed to be carrying turned out to be hand grenades and things, is just further evidence of what we have said all the time — that there are outside forces, all of them principally aligned with or sympathetic to the Communist bloc, who are in there and intervening in the legitimate affairs of those countries."

In another development, 65 House members, all but one of them Democrats, called for either an end to United States support for covert military action against Nicaragua or a chance to vote directly on the matter. The lone Republican was Representative Jim Leach of Iowa, a former Foreign Service officer.

Most Democrats on the House Intelligence committee support the contention of its chairman, Representative Edward P. Boland of Massachusetts, that the United States is in "apparent violation" of a prohibition against covert action "for the purpose of" overthrowing the Sandinist regime in Nicaragua. A House Foreign Affairs subcommittee voted last week to ban any such aid.

'Firmness About Being Skeptical'

Representative Norman Y. Mineta, Democrat of California, a member of the Intelligence Committee, said the Democrats had demonstrated "a firmness about being skeptical about the Administration's policy and implementation, which has spilled over into another area: the Administration's relationship with the Congress."

"We're overtly carrying on a covert operation, which is screwy," Mr. Mineta said in a telephone interview from San Francisco. "You could cut off the covert operation and ask, 'Should this be done as an overt operation?' The Democrats think that this is the issue we ought to be debating."

To Mr. Michel, on the other hand, the Brazilian interception of the Libyan aircraft was "a gift from God" that underscored the correctness of the Administration's position.

"I happen to think the Administration is moving along in the right direction and making some progress," Mr. Michel said.

He added that the C.I.A. might sponsor a second tour of the region next weekend, because many of the committee members were unable to reschedule commitments for this weekend. Those going on the initial C.I.A. tour are Mr. Mineta and Dave McCurdy, Democrat of Oklahoma, and three Republicans — Bob Stump of Arizona, Bill Young of Florida and G. William Whitehurst of Virginia. They will leave Washington Sunday morning.

Dodd Seeks Closed Senate Session

In a related development, Senator Christopher J. Dodd, Democrat of Connecticut, has told the leadership that he will move to have the Senate go into a closed session on Tuesday to discuss United States operations in Nicaragua.

A high-ranking Nicaraguan official, meanwhile, told reporters that although he lacked proof that the purpose of United States support of insurgents was to overthrow the Nicaraguan Government, "for us, there is no doubt about it."

The remark, by Rafael Solis, Secretary General of Nicaragua's Council of State, was made at a news conference sponsored by Representative John Conyers Jr., Democrat of Michigan. Mr. Solis acknowledged that the Libyan aircraft were headed for Nicaragua, but denied that Nicaragua intended to pass the weapons to Salvadoran guerrillas.

Nicaragua Wants Direct Talks

MANAGUA, Nicaragua, April 22 (Reuters) — Nicaragua demanded direct talks with the United States and Honduras today before considering wider discussions on the problems of Central America.

The request came in a Foreign Ministry communiqué a day after foreign ministers from nine Latin American states ended talks in Panama City.

The communiqué said, "The fundamental premise for a lasting solution of the conflict with Honduras and the United States is a dialogue between Nicaragua and the United States to end the mercenary invasion against our country and establish terms of coexistence which conform to international norms and rights."